



For Immediate Release

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Virginia Student Honored with International Award

Arlington, Va., February 27, 2023 – Cora Smith, of Williamsburg, VA, received the 2023 Yes I Can Award for Self Advocacy from the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC). Cora will be honored this March along with other Yes I Can recipients at the CEC Convention and Expo in Louisville, Kentucky.

The Yes I Can Awards celebrate the achievements of children and youth with exceptionalities, encouraging these individuals to seek their highest potential and increase public awareness of the abilities, aspirations, and personal qualities of those with disabilities.

Cora's efforts to ensure appropriate representation of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder have led her to establish a systemic shift of her school's practices for Disability Awareness Month and on. During discussion for the 2021 Disability Awareness Month activities, including a day of autism awareness, Cora spoke out about changing the "wear blue" day to "wear red instead."

She utilized social media, video, conversation, and many other mediums to spread awareness of the "wear red instead" campaign and its importance to her and other individuals within the autism community. Cora says "it was incredibly empowering to see photos of staff and students from around the district wearing red in support of my self advocacy and to receive messages from fellow Autistic students about how grateful they were for me speaking up for their rights and visibility of Autistic students around the district."

After she successfully shifted her school to wear red, she was invited to attend a meeting of the school's Special Education Advocacy Committee (SEAC). She offered her talents and skills to help them in their work of spreading awareness. The group was so thrilled, she has become the first ever student citizen member on the committee. This opportunity gives her even more opportunity to advocate for herself and fellow students with autism.



The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) is the largest international professional organization dedicated to high-quality education that is inclusive and equitable for individuals with disabilities. Learn more about CEC at <https://exceptionalchildren.org/>.

Thank you to [Pearson](#) for their continued support of the Yes I Can Awards!